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硕 士 学 位 论 文

**“Separate Spheres” and Victorian Marriage:
A Female Gothic Interpretation of Middlemarch**
**两性领域划分与维多利亚时期的婚姻:
从女性哥特角度解读《米德尔马契》**

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Abstract

This M.A. thesis aims to examine the Victorian marriage in *Middlemarch*, the representative work of the eminent writer George Eliot, from the female gothic perspective. The ideologies of “separate spheres” and “angel in the house” are the two most representative ones in almost every nineteenth-century marriage, especially during the Victorian period. The prevalence of those two ideologies relegates women into the only place-home, and they put great limitations to women’s freedom of individual improvement. Open resistance to male’s authority, most time, fails to bring success to women’s struggle. On the contrary, gothic feminism, which advocates superficially playing the traditional role and putting up secret rebellion against patriarchal figures, provides a way to combat patriarchal dominance. Through the analysis of Rosamond’s and Dorothea’s marriages in *Middlemarch*, this paper tries to unearth its hidden female gothic elements and diagnose the strategies that Rosamond and Dorothea have adopted to subvert the patriarchal dominance in the traditional marriage from the gothic feminism perspective. Moreover, this paper shows how Dorothea and Ladislaw transgress the boundary between separate spheres in the companionate marriage and go beyond the traditional gender relationship, which offers a sound basis for a wider field for women’s individual development.

The first chapter highlights the historical background for the inception of the ideologies of “separate spheres” and the conception of the “angel in the house” and their limitations to women’s individual development as well as women’s resistance. The Industrial revolution leads to change of working place and makes the home the only activity field for women. Daughter, wife and mother are women’s only roles, which greatly coops the realization of women’s potentials and dreams. Overt challenge to male’s authority only results in failure; therefore, women adopt the strategy of superficial compliance and covert rebellion.

The next chapter mainly examines two marriages of convenience: Rosamond's marriage and Dorothea's first marriage and demonstrates the debilitating effects brought by the ideology of "separate spheres" in the traditional marriage. In order to possess large fortune and elevate her social status, beautiful Rosamond chooses to marry the newly arrived doctor Lydgate. By presenting her angelic image, Rosamond successfully realizes her desires, yet she brings Lydgate failure. Dorothea, out of her longing for knowledge and realizing her potentials, marries a renowned scholar Casaubon, only to discover that he is only a self-deceptive and unsympathetic pedant. Confined in his stagnant and declining manor and enslaved by his decaying scholarship, Dorothea loses her freedom and becomes a typical female gothic heroine. The only way to save herself is her husband's death.

The third chapter points out that companionate marriage between Dorothea and Ladislav, based on the disruption of separate spheres, can not only break through the limitations to women imposed by traditional marriage, but also provides opportunities for women's all-round development. This opens new vistas for women's pursuit of equality with men. The conclusion presents a brief summary of the previous three chapters, reinforces the thesis statement and forecasts the further academic research on *Middlemarch*.

Key Words: separate spheres; female gothic; marriage of convenience; companionate marriage

摘要

本文旨在从女性哥特角度解读维多利亚时期著名作家乔治·艾略特代表作《米德尔马契》中的婚姻观。两性领域划分和家庭天使是 19 世纪婚姻，尤其是维多利亚时期婚姻中最具有代表性的两个概念。这两个概念的盛行使家成为女性唯一的活动场所，极大地限制了女性个人发展的自由。公开的反抗只会为女性带来更多的伤害，而哥特女性主义推行的表面上扮演家庭天使的角色而实际上暗中颠覆父权统治的策略有助于女性争取到她们应得的权利。本文通过探讨《米德尔马契》中两个女主人公多萝西娅和罗莎蒙德的婚姻，发掘小说中隐含的女性哥特元素，从女性哥特主义视角分析多萝西娅和罗莎蒙德在传统的婚姻关系中颠覆父权统治的策略，以及多萝西娅与拉迪斯拉夫如何在友伴型婚姻中跨越两性领域划分的传统界线，实现传统性别角色的超越，为女性拥有更加广阔的个人发展空间的新前景奠定了基础。

论文第一章主要阐述两性领域划分和家庭天使这两个现象产生的社会背景及其对女性个人发展的限制和女性对此所做的反抗。工业革命导致工作场所发生变化，家成为女性唯一的活动场所。女儿、妻子和母亲界定了女性扮演的全部角色，这三重角色限制了女性个人潜力的发挥和理想的实现。正面挑战男性权威只会落得失败的下场，因此女性采取了表面屈从、暗中颠覆的斗争策略。

第二章重点探讨《米德尔马契》中的两例权宜型婚姻，即罗莎蒙德的婚姻和多萝西娅的第一次婚姻，证明两性领域划分观念给婚姻中的两性带来的伤害。出于对财富的艳羡，为了提高社会地位，天生丽质的罗莎蒙德选择嫁给新来的医生利德盖特。通过展现自身天使的一面，罗莎蒙德借助这段婚姻成功地实现了目标，却给利德盖特带来了毁灭。出于对知识的渴慕，为了实现自身价值，天资聪颖的多萝西娅决定嫁给极具学术名望的卡梭鹏，却发现他只是一个自欺欺人、脱离社会现实的老学究。终日困在衰败的庄园、埋在腐朽的故纸堆里，多萝西娅失去自由，成为一个典型的哥特式女主人公，摆脱婚姻困境的途径是丈夫的死亡。

第三章通过对多萝西娅与拉迪斯拉夫的婚姻展开分析，指出消解两性领域划分界线的友伴型婚姻既能打破传统婚姻对两性的约束，又能为女性的个人全

面发展提供空间和机会，从而开辟了女性追求平等地位的新视野。论文结论部分主要总结前三章的主要内容，重申论点，并展望《米德尔马契》的研究前景。

关键词：两性领域划分 女性哥特 权宜型婚姻 友伴型婚姻

厦门大学博硕士论文摘要库

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Introduction

About the Author: Compromise and Rebellion

Born at South Farm, Arbury, 22 November 1819, Marian Evans (the later George Eliot) was the youngest child in the Evan's. She had a very close relationship with her brother Isaac and her passion for her brother dominated her childhood, which is reflected in the strong emotional bond between Maggie and Tom in her autobiographical novel *The Mill on the Floss*. When Isaac had to leave home for the boarding school, Marian tried to assuage emptiness and loneliness by reading books. She is a voracious reader, especially passionate about theological works. Her reputation as a learned young lady was soon spreading all over the neighborhood. Her father was very proud of her and always took her as his companion. This period of her life is fully revived through Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. Gordon S. Haight in *George Eliot: A Biography* mentions that "the little Marian received little sympathetic support and affection from her mother whose favorites were Isaac and Chrissey (her elder sister with blond and neat hair)" (1978:10), and her father is said to be "the one deep strong love she had ever known" (1978:21). Being her sole emotional support, Marian attached herself to and relied on her father's love. Before his death, she devoted herself to him and lived for him.

After much reading and through her friendship with Charles Bray, an enthusiastic supporter for reform, her doubts about her own religious belief gradually emerged. Discovering her present beliefs were incompatible with church practice, Marian refused to go to church in 1842. Mr. Evans was infuriated by his daughter's change. A holy war ensued. He swore to cut off all the relationship with Marian and did not even want to live together with her. Marian could not reconcile herself to her father's authority. Her overt opposition was considered heresy and made her the target of criticism. Almost no one stood by her. The once applauded and adorable scholar now was labeled as the infamy of the Evans. Her eldest sister Fanny Houghton urged her to pretend an outward compliance. It was only after a long

period of time, probably twelve weeks, that she brought about reconciliation with her father and attended church again. Yet “she never ceased to regret the impetuosity that had caused the conflict” (Haight, 1978:44). One of the deduced consequences of the holy war between Marian and Mr. Evans is probably that it makes her realize that public defiance can only bring estrangement and alienation from other people and that overt resistance may not bring desirable results.

After the death of Mr. Evans in 1849, Marian moved to London and began to work as an assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*, which was sponsored by John Chapman, also editor of the *Review*. She boarded at 142 Strand where Chapman lived. The room she took was a very narrow and poor-conditioned attic, barely furnished. Living in this narrow and cold place, Marian often complained about physical illness. Moreover, her close contact with Chapman and his admiration for her great intellectual capacity generated enormous jealousy and deep hatred of his wife Susanna and his mistress Elisabeth. Without any strong and stable friendship, the initial loneliness invaded her in every possible way. Yet, she could not leave that house because she was at least needed there. Chapman was not a brilliant and insightful editor and the continuation of his magazine and his success depended on her. Her father’s death deprived her chance of being needed and a strong sense of no one loving her prevailed Marian. The yearning for being loved and being useful to others made her write numerous anonymous articles for the *Review*, some of which were poorly-paid or unpaid. However, her position as editor, especially being responsible for the belles-lettres section, brought her advantages. Beryl Gray rightly points out that “it is from her work for it [the *Westminster Review*] that her own novels undoubtedly grew” (2000: 224). The editorship laid a sound basis for her successful future career as novelist. Through Chapman, she got acquainted with various literary celebrities, including Charles Dickens and William Thackeray. She also became a close friend to the rationalist philosopher Herbert Spencer. She had deep affection for him. Unfortunately, Spencer, though impressed and attracted by her intellectual powers, could not reciprocate her love, for he was more concerned about a woman’s physical beauty and wrote to her “that [he] felt in no danger of

falling in love with her” (Boos, 1985:6). Marian in his eyes was a very plain, sometimes ugly woman. But Spencer introduced her to George Henry Lewes, who became her illegitimate husband and opened a new page in Marian’s life.

“Though far different in intellectual temper, they (Marian and Lewes) had vigorous, philosophical minds, lively sense of humor, and romantic sentiments stirred by the same things. Both love and pity prompt their union” (Haight, 1978: 145). This statement succinctly describes the most significant moment in Marian’s life, when she chose to openly live together with the married Lewes. This event marks the beginning of her unconventional life. Much more severe than the holy war with her father, Marian suffered total rejection of her family and her friends, and was banished from the decent social intercourse. No one would invite them to dine with their family. In spite of all those adversities, the mutual urgent need of love compelled them to stand together. It was Lewes who first encouraged Marian to write novels. She picked up George Eliot as her pen name. Marian was intensely vulnerable to the harsh criticism against her works. Her already strong sense of diffidence would be aggravated by those attacks, which naturally resulted in her refusal to write novels. Lewes perceived her vulnerability and managed to filter all the discouraging and vicious reviews and letters. He also reminded Marian’s publisher John Blackwood, the owner of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, of her sensitivity to public comments. Due to the cooperation between her husband and her publisher, Marian fared well and achieved great success in her career and was crowned as one of the greatest Victorian novelists.

Her rising literary reputation not only brought her enormous profits, but also entitled her to rejoin the once-excluded social circle. Her wealth increased rapidly, much more than Lewes’ income. She was quite capable of supporting the whole Lewes’s family and thus eradicating the poverty from the family forever. In his later life, Lewes completely devoted himself to the support of her novel writing. Many female writers were extremely envious of her, seeing that she had her husband’s devotion and her publisher’s protection and turned her isolation from society into a perfect chance for a prosperous writing career. The once banished couple now was

invited by almost every prestigious family in England. Literary people regarded attending the intellectual gathering in their house Priory on every Sunday afternoon as a great honor and sought every opportunity to go there. Nevertheless, in spite of her huge success and increasing prominence, the repercussion of social estrangement casted a lasting shadow on Marian. She was more aware of the devastating consequences of self-assertiveness and retreated further back into self-effacement and self-denial. Virginia Woolf in her review on *Times Literary Supplement* suggests that George Eliot's nature can be more clearly detected in her heroines. A close study of Maggie Tulliver, Romola, Dorothea and also other female characters in her novels and poems, may reveal the fact that almost all of them are characterized with self-renunciation.

While the fate of those characters stands quite opposite to that of their creator, they reflect the true life panorama of Victorian women. Instead of choosing traditional roles of wife and mother, Eliot, just like a man, became a professional writer with large incomes and high social prestige and had an illegal marriage. Yet, almost none of Eliot's female characters can succeed in leading a life like hers. Maggie, her almost autobiographic character, is in a state of constant self-denial and drowns herself for her brother's forgiveness; Romola, despite her enormous intellectual ability, prefers being an assistant to her father and her husband. This most disheartening difference is the problem most readers have grappled with. Flint points out that "George Eliot was deeply mistrustful of creating idealistic exceptions" (2001:161). One of the unpleasant results of exception is that it may lead women to escape from reality and into illusions. To make her contemporary female readers more aware of their restricted conditions may be one of the reasons that Eliot portrays them in such a different way.

Literature Review

Like many Victorian writers, George Eliot's fame and popularity also went through vicissitudes. The once immensely popular novelist in the Victorian period

did not survive those sophisticated ironies of modernism. She fell into the disrepute that became attached to almost everything that is labeled Victorian in the early twentieth century. Her deep seriousness and determined pursuit of respectability turned the younger generations away from her. Yet, this sudden impulse of almost total rejection was not so reasonably justified and could not bury her reputation forever. For the centennial of George Eliot's birthday in November 1919, Virginia Woolf wrote an article for the *Times Literary Supplement*. In order to write this essay, for nearly a year, she immersed herself in Eliot's novels and the biography by John Cross. She wrote a letter to her friend in January 1919: "I am reading through the whole of George Eliot, in order to sum her up. So far, I have only made way with her life, which is a book of the greatest fascination, and I can see already that no one else has ever known her as I know her."^① Such bold claim to an intimate understanding of the novels was new, and her essay, titled "George Eliot", marked a watershed in Eliot criticism. At the end of this article, she claimed:

triumphant was the issue for her, whatever it may have been for her creations, and as we recollect all that she dared and achieved, how with every obstacle against her - sex and health and convention - she sought more knowledge and more freedom till the body, weighted with its double burden, sank worn out, we must lay upon her grave whatever we have it in our power to bestow of laurel and rose.

Woolf's unreserved compliment and admiration overflowed from this essay and veered the critical direction. Another famous writer Katherine Mansfield also championed Eliot's insight into the human mind, her realism and her unconventional view. She wrote to Middleton Murry in a letter in 1919, defending Eliot with some feminist fervor against a blunt and insensitive centennial review by Sidney Waterlow. Touched by Eliot's "ruddy and warm English" and beautiful bucolic countryside, she feels that she "must stand up for [her] sex".^② Through their efforts, Eliot's

^① It is originally from Woolf to Lay Robert Cecil, 26 Jan, 1919, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 5 vols. (New York: Harcourt, 1976), II, 321. It is quoted from Elaine Showalter's essay "The Greening of Sister George"

^② *The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. C. K. Stead. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, p.156.

reputation, to some extent, began to climb and a revival of Eliot criticism was initiated. Critics refocused their attention on Eliot's works, especially feminist critics.

During the 1970s, the heyday of the feminist movement, the criticism on her works mushroomed in the literary field. There was a heated debate over whether Eliot could be identified as a feminist. *Middlemarch* came in the spotlight of the controversy because Eliot, instead of giving a very clear feminist signal, designed a conventional marriage for the protagonist Dorothea Brooke who is capable enough to perform heroic deeds like Saint Teresa. Actually, when the novel was first published, some female readers were already dissatisfied with Dorothea's marriages, even though Eliot harvested great success both in fame and in money. Interestingly, Eliot herself talked about the common reader's response in one of her letters to her publisher John Blackwood in September 1873:

When I was at Oxford, in May, two ladies came upon me after dinner: one said, "How could you let Dorothea marry that Casaubon?" The other, "Oh, I understand her doing that, but why do you let her marry the other fellow, whom I cannot bear?" Thus two "ardent admirers" wished that the book had been quite different from what it is (qtd. in Showalter, 2004:98).

From this short description, we can already glimpse the diversified responses to this novel at that time. This irritation about Dorothea's marriage was intensified in the 1970s when women courageously flagged their independence and tried to claim their deserved rights in every aspect and seek equal place with men. Ellin Ringler examined the essays published during this period and made the following observation to nobody's surprise:

A survey of fifteen fairly representative feminist critiques of *Middlemarch*, published between 1972 and 1978, reveals only two that view it as a profoundly feminist work; the other thirteen reactions range from vehement condemnation of Eliot's betrayal of feminism in *Middlemarch* to the judgment that she was an uncertain feminist with a complex ambivalence toward the contemporary lot of women (1983:57).

Those attacks mainly focus on the great difference and contrast between Eliot's own creative and rebellious life and her characters' subjugating and compromising positions.

Besides this, opposition also partly lies in Eliot's condescending attitude towards her female contemporaries. In 1855, she wrote an essay titled "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft", in which she expressed her sympathetic feelings towards them and gave a warm review about their respective works: *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1855) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). However, her 1865 essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" is considered "a classic indictment of the literary endeavors of uneducated women" (Ringler, 1983:56) or not enough educated women. Without any hesitation, Eliot lashed out her disapproval of women's works. They did not write books to "confound philosophers", but only to "delight them". In the majority of women's works, "that fertility in imbecile combination or feeble imitation which a little self-criticism would check and reduce to barrenness"^③ is sarcastically remarked. As a result, while women's intellectual mediocrity was forcibly exposed, women's anger towards her exploded. However, those two articles also reveal Eliot's attitude toward women's education. She is willing to support women's higher education so long as "it would afford women an equal opportunity of access to the knowledge on which good judgment might be founded" (Bodenheimer, 2001:35). Therefore, she donated £50 to the founding of Girton College to support the cause of women's education.

Middlemarch, acknowledged by most critics as her masterpiece, is the controversial locus for feminist criticism. Lee Edwards in "Women, Energy, and *Middlemarch*" first points out that *Middlemarch* is a kind of "talismán" (1972:223) and "a sacred text" (1972:224) for young women. She continues to eulogize *Middlemarch* as one of the books of her life and considers herself equivalent of Dorothea in real life. However, she discovers that she misreads the novel (1972:230). The novel actually is a condemnation of women's energy, and the once

^③ Eliot, George. "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists". *The Westminster Review* (October 1856), Vol. 66 (old series), Vol. 10 (new series), pp. 442-461

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